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De Iturralde \$1.00
Needlepoint, the
sport of queens

746 D32n

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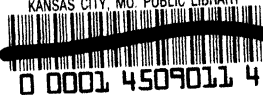
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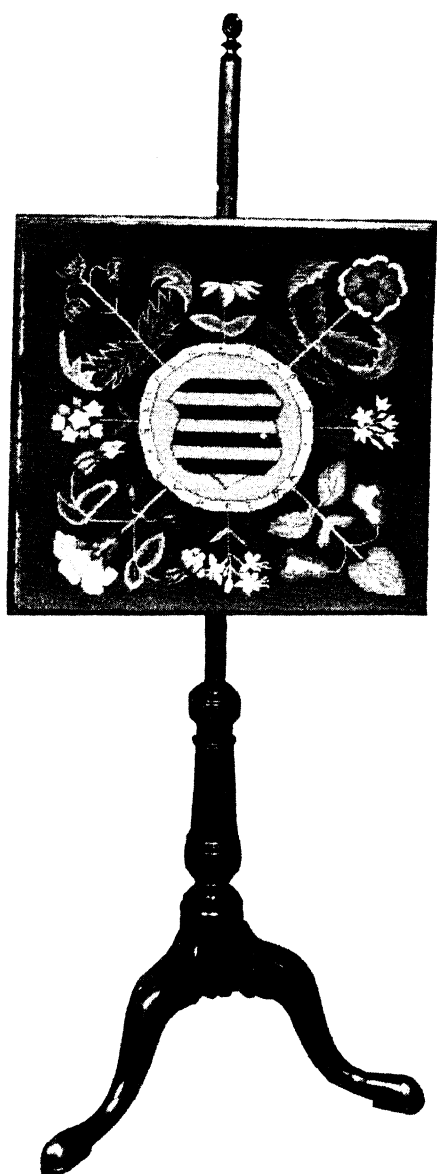


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Needlepoint .

The Sport of Queens



Needlepoint
The Sport of Queens

By

MARY SELBY DE ITURRALDE

With Illustrations

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Dedication

The nightingale, I know 's outmoded,
Since Chivalry became corroded
And Honor's gone to pot;

And yet I dedicate these pages
To such a bird, wee, but courageous,
That, from a garden-plot

In Barcelona sang unending
A counterpoint to bullets rending
The air with spitting shot.

Foreword

This book is not intended as a detailed history of needlepoint. It reviews briefly the various periods; but it is directed toward those American women who, in a country noted for its mechanical development, still have an atavistic wish to create something acceptable for their homes with their own hands.

The author has designed and worked needlepoint for a number of years. She believes that most women who undertake to work a piece of needlepoint do so, not merely to busy their hands, but with a well-defined object in view. They are turning over in their minds the use, the size, the subject-matter and the coloring in relation to the room in which the finished fabric will be used. All these considerations are matters of personal preference.

The aim of this book is to point out the characteristics of good periods of needlepoint design, and to discuss ways in which their best features may be incorporated into patterns prepared today.

Throughout, the author is speaking from the standpoint of the designer. She has great respect for the few antiques that are to be found in museums and collections. She feels that if a period is being copied, it must be copied exactly; lacking an original needlepoint the next best is to copy a known example.

But where an occasional piece is wanted, and where color harmonies are considered to be quite as important as history, there are many adaptations that may be permitted without offending good taste.

The author spent the year of 1936-1937 in Europe, travelling with her husband in their automobile. She studied many private collections of textiles, and the museums of all the cities visited, especially the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Bargello in Florence, the Guild Hall at Ferrara, Italy; collections

in museums and monasteries in Seville, Guadelupe, Toledo, Madrid, Granada, Barcelona; the Gobelin in Paris, the Guild Hall in Lyon, and numerous others.

They saw Spain before the outbreak of the war there, and then spent the winter in Rome, Italy, where they visited the museums, cathedrals and many private palaces under the guidance of Sr. Don Elías Tormo, who had been Professor of the History of Art at the University of Madrid for a number of years.

M. S. de I.

The Sport of Queens

Let any wight (if such a wight there be)
That poketh fun at honest industry—
Let such a wight attend;
And I'll endeavour to acquaint his mind
With crumbs of knowledge I may chance to find,
And thus his darkness end.

Bifell that in the days of Chivalry
When Knights were brave, and Ladies tried to be
There rose a curious Art
Out of a very real necessity
To cover walls with something fine to see
And warming to the heart.

(For heart and body both had need, I ween,
Of warmth and colour as a sort of screen
Against the blasting cold.)
And so the Ladies and the Damosels
Wove Lambes wool to create Fairy spells
With wondrous stories told.

Now if so be they puffed the tale a bit
And in the weary hours of weaving it
Their Lord came out on top,
And seemed in wool the man he never was—
He still may please us more than any has
Who's but a fancy Fop.

When, in Great Britain, Art began to rest
And Knights began to lose Crusading zest
And stay more close at home,
Their Tapestries no longer suffered wear
From being rudely carted here and there
With armies on the roam.

And soon their homes were filled with woven joys
Of picturesque (but naughty), girls and boys;
In short, they had enough
Of Tapestry to last a goodly time.
And then the Ladies seized a thought sublime
And copied from the stuff

Small scenes to fit the furniture itself
Where foot-high warriors spread their pelf
For intimate regard;
These cheered Milord while he at table sat
And pleased Milady while she paused to chat—
They also made the bench less hard.

For-that this Art was done with needle's aid
And wrought upon a cloth already made
They dubbed it Needlepoint.
And on it men and beasts in miniature
Full many a jaded eye-ball did allure—
Which was, of course, its point.

For all its reason and its only aim
Was some rude guest to help to tame
And eke to civilize
With fabric tales of gentle courtesy
That had been done by nobler men than he
To win some blissful prize.

With colour bold and high and clear
They pictured deeds that he might hear
(Albeit through his eyes)
Of gallant men and brave and strong
Who lived full well, though seldom long—
Romantic were, yet wise.

Each curve that swept and flower that glowed
 Along a Needlepointed road
Or pictured distant hill
 Carried a woolen message clear:
“If you see naughte but colours here
 For Heavyn’s sake, keep still

And don’t expose to publick view
 The fact that there is naughte to you
But what the eye behold.
 Don’t fret, ‘The red’s too red, the brown too
 brown,’
Lest wiser Mortals put you down
 A Wight devoid of soul.”

PART I



The Mechanical Side of Needlepoint

The terms embroidery, tapestry, and needlepoint are thoroughly tangled together, and they may as well be straightened now.

Embroidery is probably the most ancient of the three. The collection of bone needles in the British Museum, of the Stone Age, suggests the antiquity of the use of stitches. The silver needles in the Bargello Palace in Florence, Italy, are delicate enough to have been used on any of the needlepoints existing today. The bronze needles in the Villa Giulia, in Rome, taken from the Etruscan ruins of Cerveteri, were used in 700 B. C. and are fine enough to have made any sort of embroidery.

Simple lacing to hold skins together was probably used before any weaving skill was developed.

By the word embroidery we mean decorative stitchery applied with needle and thread to the surface of a fabric already finished.

Tapestry is made by a special process of weaving; plain threads are stretched on the loom to form the warp. The pattern is woven directly into the material with colored threads. Design and fabric are made at the same time.

Needlepoint uses a fabric already woven, called canvas. The design is made by threads stitched through the open mesh of the canvas. The canvas itself is not decorative. The best quality is a single weave made of coarse, unbleached linen threads, so strong they can hardly be broken.

Wool needlepoint has often been called "Needle-point tapestry" to distinguish it from the lace that is called needlepoint.

A large part of the charm of needlepoint is the simplicity of the stitches used.

Really there are only two needlepoint stitches — the half-cross-stitch and the Bargello stitch. The terms Continental stitch, basket-weave, herring-bone, etc., refer to the manner in which the thread is manipulated on the wrong side of the material.

The half-cross-stitch always slants; the Bargello stitch is always straight—usually vertical, though it may be horizontal.

Petit point is very small half-cross-stitch; gros point is coarse half-cross stitch.

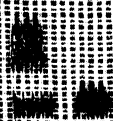
When a pattern is done on double-weave canvas, details may be done in petit point, splitting the weave, and the remainder of the piece done in gros point.

If the needlepointer were unlimited in the length and direction of her stitch, fine shading and realistic drawing would be easily and quickly achieved—but the finished product would be merely copying the technique of painting. A painter may be as painstaking and literal in detail as Lawrence with his be-ribboned George IV (in the Pinacoteca of the Vatican Museum in Rome); in that portrait every smallest brush-stroke counts in the clarity of the result.

But the needlepointer interprets. Landscape is suggested rather than mirrored. Flowers and leaves are more flat than Nature made them. Sometimes, to avoid blurring, the natural shading of a leaf or petal is reversed, and a light line of wool is laid along an edge to keep it from sinking into the shadow.

In needlepoint the entire design is built up of stitches that are exactly the same size all over the piece, and that slant in one direction only.

The curve of a flower-petal must be made by a series of angular steps, but when it is finished it must



BARGELLO



PETIT

GROS

be a curve; tints and shadows must show; the whole must suggest unmistakably the flower that grew in a garden.

English histories of needlework frequently use the term "tent-stitch on canvas" for needlepoint. This is said to refer to the use of needlepoint in ancient times as decoration for the tents of nobles who took these fabrics to the battlefield with them. Numerous records of needlepoint as spoils of war seem to bear out this theory.

Century By Century

Needlepoint is distinctly European (or Asiatic) in origin. Although tapestry-weaving of the sort found in scraps of Coptic fabrics is known to have been done by Pre-Inca Indians of the New World* the needlepoint stitch on woven canvas has never been discovered here. The tradition of needlepoint was brought from England and France to the Colonies in the Western Hemisphere.

Completely to appreciate needlepoint we must put our present-day drab simplicity out of mind. We must go back to a young, a gay, a fresh world, where men delighted in meadows twinkling with flowers; in trees and vines that blossomed handsomely before they bore fruit.

When the men of that lost Gothic world built cathedrals and chapels to glorify their crowds of saints they pictured their heavenly company in stained glass windows that shone with the clear brilliance of a blossoming garden.

Flowers were brought in out of the fields and prisoned with wool and silk in the fabrics of the times. Not only on cushions and wall-coverings, but on clothing, too.

Chaucer describes his

“Yong Squyer

Embrouded was he, as it were a mede

Al ful of fresh floures white and rede.

Singing he was, or floytinge, al the day;

He was as fresh as is the month of May.”

We must forget our modern miracles of window glass. We must go, in imagination, to the gloomy halls of gray stone castles where tiny slits high in the

*SYMONDS AND PREECE, *Needlework Through the Ages*, pp. 4, 5.



Floral Wall Panel

Flowers and birds native to Tidewater Virginia; in natural colors on dark blue ground. Border, cross-vine on a tan ground. Eleven-point canvas. Designed and worked by the author.

outer walls let stray sunbeams in. Colors of clothing and draperies were the only bright notes.

Benches of marble, window-sills of stone, seats made of oak wood needed cushioning. Fireplaces that roared in winter were yawning holes in the wall all summer. A decorated screen would hide the blackened stones from view.

While heavy, cumbersome looms were kept busy weaving all the textiles, and the lady of the castle might or might not have some part in that, it was a simple matter for her to set up a small frame, easily carried from room to room, or into the courtyard in summer, and make smaller articles for the household in needlepoint. Francesco Cossa, in his fresco "Allegory of March — Triumph of Minerva" in Ferrara shows ladies in the dress of nobility doing needlepoint on an adjustable frame.

It would be interesting, perhaps appalling, to learn how many women have sat at a needlepoint frame slowly building up color and design while they waited for news of the latest battle—building with a kind of stubborn patience, in a world that seemed intent on tearing down.

It is impossible to say just when needlepoint was first made, and by whom. Early records frequently speak simply of "needlework," which may be embroidery, cut-work, Crewel work or needlepoint.

There is evidence to show that needlework was taught in the tenth century in England. And William the Conqueror's Domesday Book records land granted to a woman in payment for teaching a sheriff's daughter the art of embroidery in gold.

It is fairly certain that the great body of English needlework known as *Opus Anglicanum* contained much needlepoint.

By the Sixteenth Century needlepoint was in common use. Some well-preserved examples have survived. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I it was

a thriving art. Elizabeth is said to have been proficient with the needle, and her beloved cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, must have filled all of her years of imprisonment with needlepoint, to judge by the pieces ascribed to her.

We have become so accustomed today to looking on handwork as a pleasing way of passing otherwise idle hours that we are apt to forget it was once the only method of creating textiles.

Wool-weaving was classed in the *Arti Maggiori* (Major or Greater Arts) in Mediaeval Florence, and European Guilds in general protected the rights of dyers, weavers, wool-workers and needleworkers with jealous vigor.

Three years after she ascended the throne of England Elizabeth I granted the Broderers' Company of London its first charter, though the company had been in existence as far back as 1430.

This charter granted broad powers to the members of the company, and fixed punishments for members who did inferior work. Work-shops were searched for fraudulent goods, and needlework to be placed on sale had to be brought to the Guild Hall and sealed before it was sold. Goods deemed "insufficiently wrought" were destroyed.

Long apprenticeship was necessary, standards for judging the quality of stitchery were set, and Guild members were not allowed to work at night, because the light was too poor to permit good craftsmanship.



Miss Eleanor Calkins, of Williamsburg, doing needlepoint on a frame. The head of the frame tips to any angle, and is held in place by a wing-nut. Frame, of walnut, especially designed and made for the author.

Pattern

The idea of having pattern cover the entire surface is essentially Oriental. Remember the ceilings and walls of La Alhambra, in Granada, Spain, the mosaic floors in St. Mark's Cathedral in Venice, Italy; Bargello pattern—every stitch a part of a geometric design; it has no plain surface at all.

English artisans applied this idea to needlepoint. First the Tudor, which has "sundry sorts of spots" more or less unrelated, but all serving to cover the canvas with pattern. Then the florals following the Tudor designs, down to the master hand of Thomas Chippendale, arranging leaves, buds and blossoms into a pattern beautiful in its unity and deeply satisfying in color.

The differences between periods lie, not in the choice of flowers and leaves, but in the manner in which they were drawn and placed. True, early Gothic designs used wild flowers scattered thickly over a dull dark ground; Tudor used strawberries, pears, plums, acorns, pansies, single roses, honeysuckle and thistles; and Chippendale seems to lean toward acanthus leaves, huge carnations, double roses and tulips; but, whatever the flower or fruit, it was the drawing that made the difference.

Trends in needlepoint have no regard for the historian, who, for convenience, would like to find them beginning in a certain year, and ending in another. They run into one another; they adapt and modify each other; every once in a while they go back and copy from an earlier time.

Heedless copying of even fine antiques soon makes them hackneyed and meaningless. Scrolls and arabesques have a place—a small one—in edging a design. But when they become endlessly repetitive, and appear unfailingly in chair-seats, fireplace screens,

bench-covers, they are as monotonous and uninspired as crickets on a summer night.

While there has always been a slight tendency to copy woven tapestries, or details from them, in needlepoint, by far the greater amount of it is original in design and treatment.

The earliest clearly-defined period in English needlepoint is the Tudor. Some of the most delightful examples of this period are floral, with gracefully curving scrolls uniting the entire pattern, and with the most diverse kinds of flowers growing on the ends. The same stem will bear a honeysuckle spray, a Tudor rose, a yellow thistle and an oak leaf. Yet, such was the skill of the artisan, it is not incongruous. To the question: "Do you gather figs of thistles?" the answer might be: "Yes, in Tudor needlepoint."

A characteristic of this period that never fails to refresh and intrigue is that, although the needleworker lifts a plant out of its proper sphere and scale, the finished product is still a faithful interpretation of the original. The delicacy, or the boldness, the fragility or the sturdiness of a plant is tellingly put down, with remarkably few colors, and with no tricks of stitchery to make the drawing easier.

It is always dangerous to describe one pattern and one type of coloring as representative of a period, (particularly since the designs were individual, and not copies,) but there were general trends in Tudor needlepoint that may be noted.

The central figure would be a person, a group of persons, or a fruit (usually pear) tree. Spotted about, above, below, on every hand were flowers, birds, beasts, insects, gayly disregarding the laws of gravity and rules for proportion, and yet, by cunning repetition of colors, avoiding being a mere conglomeration of unrelated objects. There is a reasonableness about the entire design that must be seen to be believed.



Panel For a Pole-Screen

In the style of the Tudor period.

Flowers and leaves in natural colors, high-lighted with silk; stems light brown.

Background especially dyed in Cathedral gray — a warm green-gray, 11-point canvas. Designed and worked by the author.

Landscape was sometimes used, often with a very literal sun shedding all its beams down upon the round hills and their strange population.

Background color was usually a soft wood brown, though dull mustard color and a warm gray are sometimes seen.

The early herbals, Gerard's, Parkinson's, Turner's, contained many wood-cuts, which were eagerly seized upon by the needlepointers. The flat, unrealistic treatment of flowers in some Tudor needlepoint looks at first glance to be the work of unskilled beginners or of children. Closer study and comparison with wood-cuts show that the figures have been done in needlepoint as they were in the wood-cuts, except that colored wools and silks have been used.

Many books, bestiaries, books of emblems, were published solely as pattern books. They did not stop with what Nature had given them, but cheerfully entered into the realm of the impossible, and invented griffins, centaurs, unicorns, sea-serpents, and (in this period before trade with China had influenced English decoration) proper English dragons.

In 1542 Konrad von Gesner's *Catalogus Plantarum* was published. The same author's *Historia Animalum* was published during the years 1551 to 1558, and was drawn upon by needleworkers. Gesner is credited with picturing the sea-serpent.

The reason for the drawings of weird animals that filled the bestiaries has puzzled many historians. All the theology of the Middle Ages pictures imps and evil spirits as animals. The gargoyles of the old cathedrals froze these horrifying creatures into stone. Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris is especially blest with such curious decoration. One authority believes that the gargoyles were meant to serve as warnings — to put as ugly a face as possible on evil—and that they were always counterbalanced by the sweet faces of the carven saints and cherubim.

This contrast stands out strongly in the Cathedral of Barcelona. Some of its gargoyles are the most thorough sinners imaginable; directly opposite one of the worst is a small Virgin with such a gentle smile that the observer naturally smiles in return.

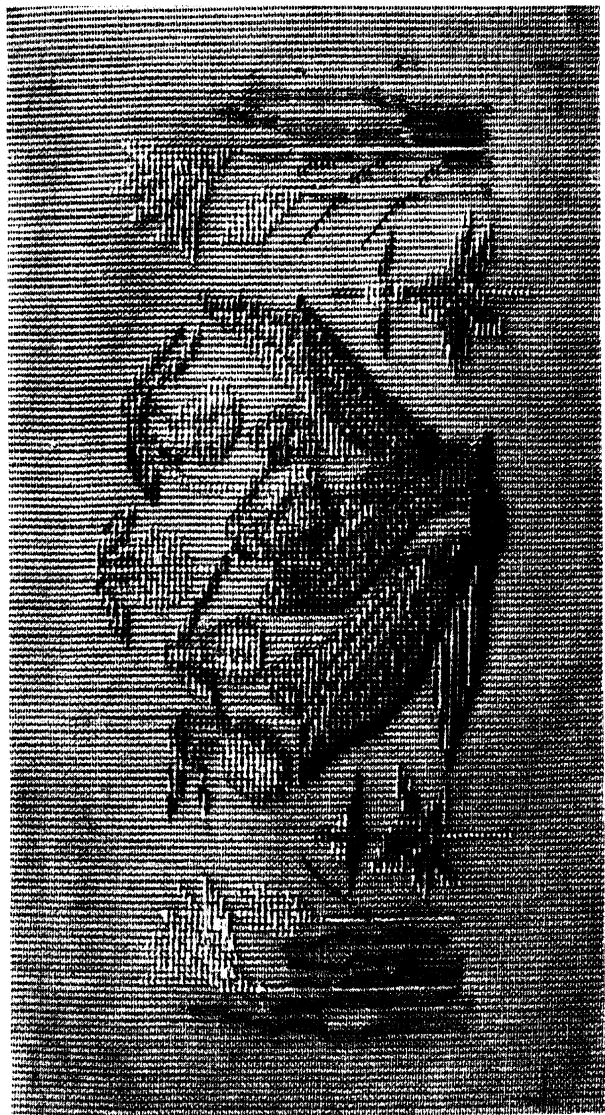
The warning character of the beasts has been discarded by the early needlepointers and embroiderers, and only the gross form retained. The lions roar but mildly; the prancing leopards wouldn't harm a mouse.

A description of a set of needlework panels attributed to Mary, Queen of Scots lists the following: lion, tiger, horse, unicorn hedgehog (thornebacke) hart, ounce, hawk and hare, centipede, solan-goose, phoenix, pelican, jay, pheasant, turtledove, dolphin, "a Byrd of America", cockatrice, swordfish, a "Rhineocerote of the sea", a "sea Moonke", bees, snails, butterflies, and fruits. The names are given for them. The Byrd of America is the turkey.

The pattern books often had the designs pricked out, apparently so that the user might rub powder through, and so stamp the material to be worked.

One pattern book advertises, among other items, "Sundry sorts of Spots, as Flowers, Birds and Fishes; and will fitly serve to be wrought, some with gould, some with silke, and some with Crewell."

While all these objects were put upon one page, they were not intended as a made-up design. They were to be used individually, in whatever grouping the worker wished. It is always a surprise to a New World resident to thread his way among dragons, rainbows, clouds and raindrops, purple columbine, Cheddar pinks, English daisies, and come suddenly upon a complacent turkey, which familiar bird makes its appearance in European tapestry and needlepoint soon after the beginning of New World exploration. This is one evidence of the keen interest the Sixteenth Century took in its world, and the eagerness with which new materials were used.



Tramè Floral Wall Panel

Terrestrial Orchids native to Tidewater Virginia, with Jamestown Lily; *Cypripedium acaule*, *Isotria verticillata*, and *Zephyranthes atamasco*. Laid on in tramé, ready to be worked. In natural colors, high-lighted with silk, on a wood-brown ground. Designed and laid on in tramé by the author.

Gardens were often planted especially for tapestry-weavers and needlepoint workers, so that they might study the flower as it grew—a method never yet improved upon.

STUART OR JACOBÉAN WORK, which followed Tudor, had bold, sometimes meaningless swirls and groups of exotic flowers. Needlepoint of this period copied at times the fantastic trees and vines with their heavy foliage and outlandish blossoms that had been embroidered in Crewel work, and that strongly suggest their Oriental ancestry.

In the time of Charles II intricate portraits of the royal family, or court scenes were worked out, debasing the character of needlepoint, while failing to attain the quality of good painting.

Designs of the WILLIAM AND MARY PERIOD were almost always floral, sometimes quite heavy and somber in effect.

QUEEN ANNE (1702-1714) stamps a time of graceful furnishing with her name. Furniture was not so massive; the beauty of walnut grain was allowed to stand unadorned in a chair. It was relieved by the pleasant formality of a needlepoint floral that covered the seat of the chair—or in the case of the comfortable wing-chairs, serving as the entire upholstery.

Loosely-laid florals were frequently used; occasionally a vase or basket of flowers. Flowers were not apt to be drawn larger than life-size. Sometimes a landscape was set into the back of a sofa, with the floral arrangement easily covering the canvas around it.

Designs of this period were not stiff, but they were done with care and precision. Background colors ranged between dark mustard and brown.

THE GEORGIAN PERIOD (1714-1830) saw the

rise of mahogany as a cabinet wood; chairs were heavy, but not so clumsy as the Tudor oak pieces had been. The French influence in English needlepoint was noted, with its pictorial pieces of soft coloring and delicate design.

THOMAS CHIPPENDALE, whose furniture is perhaps the most representative of the eighteenth century, designed not only chairs but the needlepoint to cover them. A. F. Kendrick, in his "English Decorative Fabrics of the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Centuries," discussing the fact that the ladies of the household did a great deal of the needlework, says:

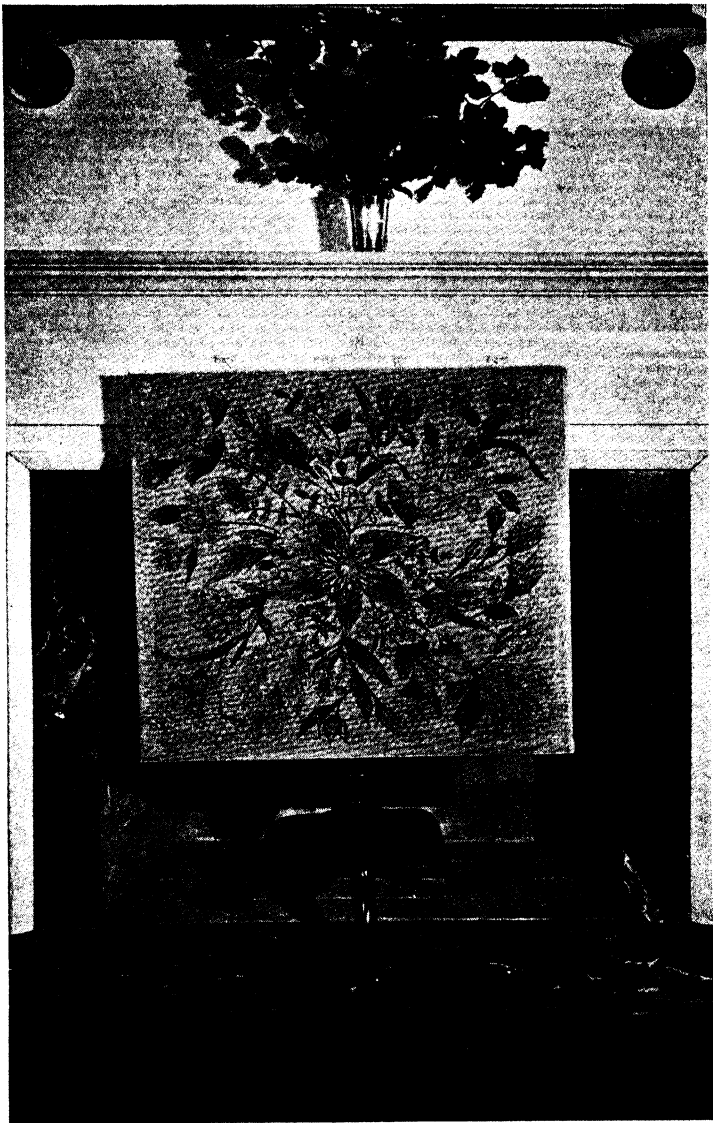
"But professional help was also obtainable, and sometimes the needlework coverings were supplied by the furniture makers. The most famous of these, Thomas Chippendale, would send out to his customers patterns for needlework, which would 'take some time in working.' "

Chippendale's needlepoints are neither so bold in color nor so set in pattern as those of Queen Anne period. He frequently used a small landscape, several human figures, or birds as a central motif, done in petit point, with arabesques of gros point surrounding it.

His loose arrangements of flowers and leaves, drawn usually slightly more than life-size and laid on dull, green-blue background, suited the generous size and elegance of his chairs perfectly.

Chippendale may be said to be the last good designer of needlepoint. From his time on we find an increasing tendency to copy museum pieces, and details taken from tapestries, but a steady descent into the days when handwork was looked upon as a quaint waste of time.

It will be noted that nothing has been said here of



Gaming-Table Top

In the style of Chippendale. Pattern designed and painted on 14-point canvas by the author. Ready to be worked. Flowers in natural colors, high-lighted with silk; background to be dull green-blue.

Table especially designed to stand against fireplace as a screen, or, with top laid down, to serve as gaming-table or tea-table. Table is of Honduras mahogany.

ecclesiastical work. That is because designs were so frequently interchanged. Church vestments often portrayed secular subjects, and home decoration was quite apt to use religious subjects. Then, too, embroidery is much more frequently used on Church vestments than is needlepoint.

BARGELLO WORK runs through all the periods that have just been discussed. It comes from the Orient, and has the endless repetition of design and the bright colors that betray its origin. It is a vertical stitch, usually two threads high and one thread wide. It is also called Hungarian point, Florentine work, and flame stitch. It is used in any number of combinations—stitches four threads long alternating with groups of shorter lengths, thus making texture as well as pattern important. The design is always geometric.

The name Bargello comes from the Bargello Palace in Florence, where there is an excellent collection of chairs upholstered in this stitch, in shades of green.

Much work in Bargello stitch was done by Saracens who remained in France and Spain after the expulsion of the Moors.

Uses of Needlepoint

One of the earliest known uses of needlepoint is for cushions. They were placed on divans, and formed the loose seats of benches and backless chairs of the Middle ages and earlier.

When chairs began to be fully upholstered, about the time of William and Mary, needlepoint lent itself nicely to the fashion. It also covered whole sofas, footstools, benches, fireplace screens, pole screens, fan-screens, gaming-table tops. Bookbindings, carpets, wall-hangings, and the furnishings of the great four-poster beds all were made of needlepoint.

Fireplace screens were made (and still should be) to fit the fireplace and were used only when there was no fire burning, to hide the black fireplace wall from view.

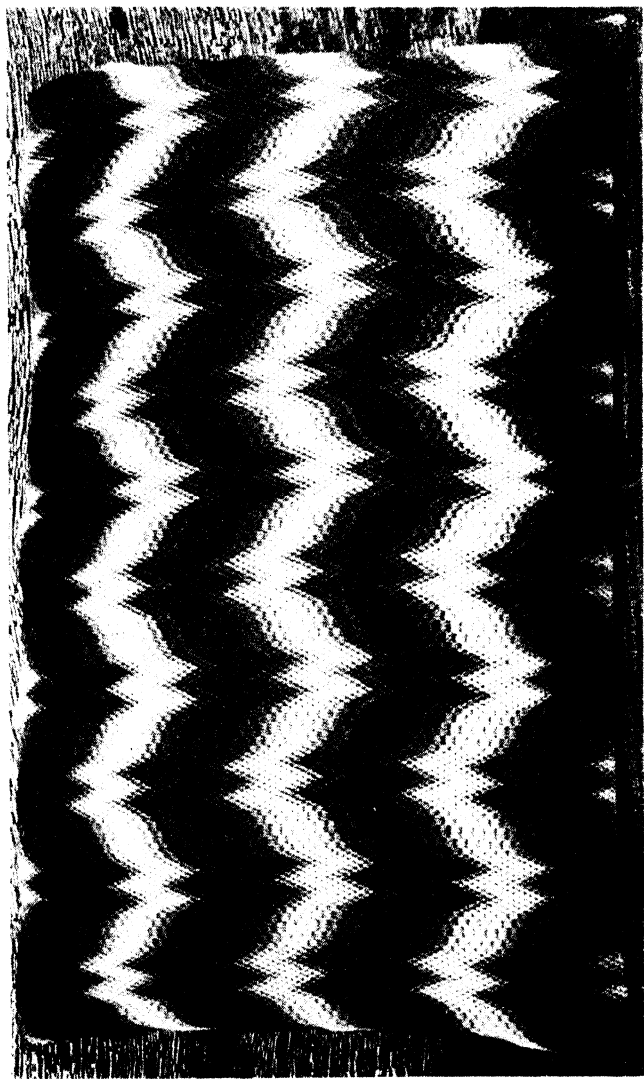
Pole screens were smaller, and were fitted on pedestals so they could be raised or lowered easily. They were used while the fire was burning. A familiar and very comfortable fireside arrangement was a tall wing-chair, with back and wings so built as to keep drafts off the shoulders. Between this chair and the blazing fire stood a pole-screen, ready to be adjusted to keep the intense heat and glare off the face of the chair's occupant.

Fan-screens were small, made in the shape of a fan, and kept on the mantelpiece to be held in the hand before the face.

In no case was glass used over the needlepoint.

Bookbindings

The needlepoint on the outside of this book is properly a book-cover. It is being used as a jacket on the outside of a cherished volume in the author's library. But the original use of needlepoint in this connection



Cushion in Bargello Pattern

In shades of brown and green. Design copied by author in Florence, Italy.

was as the binding itself, to protect an enclosed manuscript.

In the British Museum among the precious tatters of early records there are cases full of book bindings. Some of them are embroidered on velvet, but more often they are entirely of needlepoint. Gold and silver, amethysts, pearls, turquoises still sparkle, winking from the ancient patterns like indomitable eyes that have not slept in all these centuries.

Often the manuscript inside was written by the same person who designed and worked the needlepoint on the cover.

Materials Used in Needlepoint

Strong canvas, preferably linen, a blunt needle with a large eye, called Tapestry needle, wools, silks, and one patient artisan are the simple requirements.

For the author, at least, a working frame with a good stand is a necessity. It holds the unfinished piece firmly, so that each stitch has the proper tension, and the canvas does not pull out of shape.

The type of wool known as Crewel is best. It is thin, but well twisted. The strength of a strand of wool lies not in its thick diameter, but in the number of times it is twisted to the linear inch. Crewel wool takes dye well, too, and a good range of soft, clear colors is obtainable.

Up to the late eighteenth century the metal gold and silver were used, as well as seed pearls and various precious stones. Sometimes thin flat flakes of gold were laid on and couched down, but more often the gold or silver was wrapped about a core of silk thread; these often were used for heavy outlying, several being laid side by side and fastened by couching. The metals also were drawn out into thin strands, and used as thread would be. Some of the famous funeral palls of the London Guilds were covered with needlework in precious metals.

PART II



Needlepoint Today

There is no denying that the making of a piece of needlepoint is a long task—three or four months for a single chair seat is an average performance.

At present there are two schools of thought. One school, adopting Edward Third's motto, "It is as it is," insists that needlepoint must be done by periods—that just because a pattern is antique it must be excellent. These are the good people who have wools dyed in dull grayed tones; who patiently count off, stitch by stitch, patterns that were new and sparkling two centuries and more ago.

The other school lightly heaves overboard every suspicion of history, and covers inoffensive canvas with blobs and jiggers and splashes and wheels and semi-circles. Any whimsical notion, however trivial and momentary, is excitedly prepared to cover a chair or screen a fireplace.

But between the Arctic Period Needlepointer and the Antarctic Freethinker lies a whole fertile continent. Here are several rules to illustrate how that continent may be cultivated.

I. If the idea is better expressed in any other medium, don't bother with needlepoint. The misty lights of a Spring landscape can be caught with fifteen minutes' brushwork and a little paint. They will be pastel wools and nothing more in needlepoint.

Shimmering expanses of water and tender blue sky can make a Sorolla painting unforgettable—but wools



Bench Cover

Native Autumn Flowers in natural colors on a dark blue-green ground; designed and painted by the author. Ready to be worked.

refuse to shimmer. Those twinkling points of light where the sun strikes through water will be just so many light green stitches, if they are attempted with wool.

The bright swirl of a Spanish dancer's skirt needs a quick, sure Goya to picture it—in needlepoint it would be a great deal too much red worsted.

A building, a gateway, a stone wall, will do well to stick to the builder's trade. Let the sharpened pencil sketch them, or the blue-print show them exact to the last detail.

If it is a funny, frivolous or transient idea, it has not enough permanence for needlepoint.

II. Draw upon the good points of the antique needlepoints to interpret today's world. There were outstanding good points. Among them were:

A. USEFULNESS. A piece of needlepoint was made to brighten a dull bit of wall, and it usually told a story; or it was made to call attention to admissible family history by showing the Coat of Arms; or to screen a fireplace, or to cushion chairs, sofas, benches.

B. THEY ILLUSTRATED THE MAKER'S INTERESTS. Fields full of flowers, trees, birds, animals, insects had certain characteristics that appealed to the makers of needlepoint, or to the patrons who ordered it made. Fairy tales, myths, hero stories, allegories were excellent subjects for needlepoint.

C. THEY COVERED THE CANVAS WITH DESIGN.

Beginning with the earliest examples and coming down to the present moment, a good pattern is so designed that there is only enough background to unify it.

The wreath or bunch of flowers with background all around, often called Victorian, had its beginning in nineteenth century Germany (hence the name "Berlin wool-work") and was unforgivably crude of color and tiresome of treatment.

Only the rarest genius could arrange flowers for needlepoint. Too often they were just a tight bunch in a hard-colored vase, and the faults that might have been concealed were pushed firmly forward by dead, very dead, black wool.

D. THEY WERE DESIGNED TO ORDER.

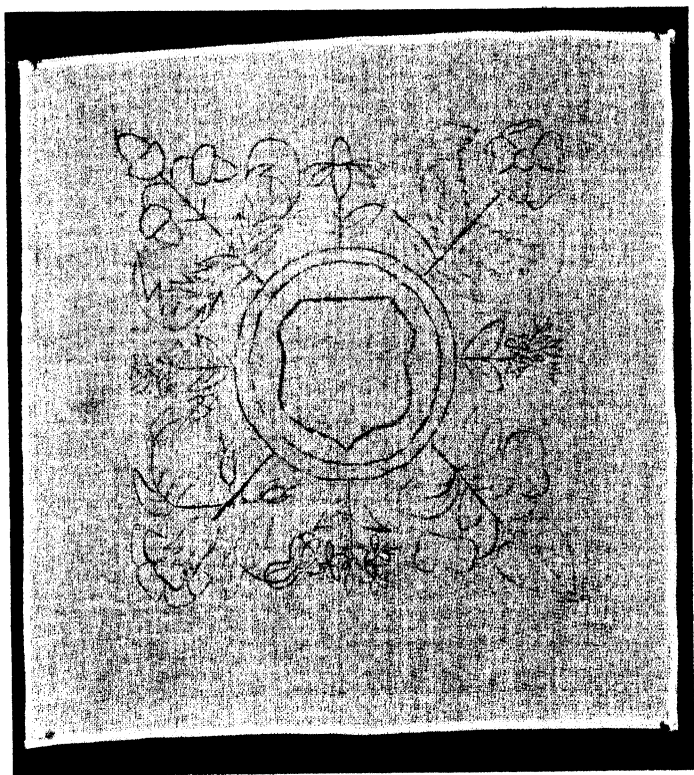
The use was first determined upon, then needlepoint was made to suit. There was similarity of idea, treatment and color, but no slavish repetition. We have become so accustomed to machine-made fabrics that we try to have our hand-work look as though it had been done mechanically, and we have wrongly tried to have dozens of patterns exactly alike, rather than similar but individual.

Designing in the eighteenth century and earlier was usually done by the person who worked the needlepoint. The writer has repaired antique needlepoint pieces, and where the wool had worn away the bare canvas had merely dim outlines in black paint. There was no color guide, merely the outlines of the figures.

E. THEY WERE COLORED TO THE LIGHT THEY HAD.

One of the strongest arguments against faithful copying of antique needlepoint is that the true colors are too bright. They are, for the well-lighted homes and the strong sunlight of the United States.

English needlepoints were made for wood-panelled rooms in stone houses or castles, and to be seen in a misty, dim light that dulls colors. They had to be clear and sharp to avoid fading into a blur.



Line Drawing For a Pole Screen

First step in working the piece shown upholstered in the frontispiece.

Shield of Arms of the author's family, in a Tudor panel. Four corners copied from a piece done by Mary, Queen of Scots. Four sides are New World plants, not found in the Old World. Natural colors, high-lighted with silk, on Cathedral gray ground. Designed and worked by author.

To be endured today, fabrics must be less insistent in tone and pattern. This is accomplished in needlepoint by using more colors for shading, and a lighter color scale.

All of these tendencies and characteristics can be used by the most recent needlepoint piece, and in the opinion of this writer, they are highly desirable.

On the other hand, we must not be bound too rigidly. We should study such antique pieces as we have. But, once thoroughly familiar with their best practices, we must re-interpret.

We need to take the materials, that have changed so little in all the years, and put onto canvas our own view of the world about us. A wild flower, sketched in the woods, will be one interpretation to one needleworker. But it must not be portrayed woodenly again and again in the same pose. It must be sketched in all sorts of lights and all stages of development. It must grow on the canvas as truthfully as it grew on the hillside.

Intensity of light and shade varies in the United States more than in Europe. Light here is harsher, brighter. Soil conditions have a great deal to do with color and growth of plants. The subtle coloring that is so charming in an English woodland, and that was copied in their landscapes, is lost in America. The sudden warmth in spring here forces flowers and fades their colors.

There is apt to be more yellow-green in the leaves of our plants. Very few of our native flowers have the dull mauve tints of the wild foxglove. Its color varies, too, depending upon whether you see it by a shady English brook, when it is almost purple, or stubbornly digging its toes into the gray granite of a cliff in Seville Province, Spain; then it is faded and considerably smaller.

In designing our own needlepoint we must re-state, or state for the first time, what we see of beauty in

the world about us. For we see it individually. The world is newly created for each pair of eyes.

It is neither sufficient nor desirable for our new Millefleur to have the same idea as a fourteenth century tapestry. It must use that idea in a manner that stamps the finished piece as craftsmanship peculiar to that worker.

And yet this is not to advocate affectation—no mere trickery of line or color; no striving after the interpretation of a tapestry-weaver dead these several centuries.

Today's Millefleur must be new; it must have the vigor of the century in which we are living; somehow it must utilize the simple forms of earthly materials in a way that could not possibly have been done by Old World craftsmen in earlier ages. We must bring something to our work that they had not yet learned. Otherwise as artisans we are worse than dead—we are content to be dead.

F. THEY USED MATERIALS AT HAND

The reason why we see so many English daisies, honeysuckles, pinks, roses, carnations, acanthus, leaves in English antique needlepoints is that they were close by the artisan, and could easily be drawn. A needleworker who had the skill to originate those designs had also the alert mind that understands and evaluates environment.

There is a point worth remembering. Within an easy day's drive of the Atlantic Coast the plant life of the mountain regions can be studied. Most of the native plants in this region are widely distributed. Here is excellent material for needlepoint design. Color and form of native American flowers are quite as decorative as in the European varieties.

It seems logical to group them according to blooming time—an early spring group would include hepatica, southern ginger, bloodroot, rue anemone, silene,



Chimney Piece

Virginia Autumn Landscape. Designed and laid on in tramé by the author. Ready to work. Design is marked by lines of wool.

birdfoot violet, and in the highlands "the yellow violet's modest bell." Birds that are singing when these bloom are robin, meadowlark, thrasher, and, south of Washington, D. C., the mockingbird.

The later spring group will have terrestrial orchids—pink lady's slipper, yellow lady's slipper, arethusa, pogonia, showy orchids, as well as red-and-yellow columbine, lupine and Jack in the pulpit. Cardinals, summer tanagers and towhees are singing at this time.

An autumn group will show yellow false foxglove, purple gerardia, deer grass, sabatia, gentians, jewelweed, yellow toadflax.

In selecting flowers to sketch for needlepoint the more delicately shaped ones are to be avoided. To work out successfully in needlepoint both leaf and flower should have mass.

The naturalistic treatment of native flowers, as seen in the Gothic tapestries (the "Hunt of the Unicorn" series, especially) seems best.

Flowers and Their Legends

A verse in the Catalán language runs:

E ací verets violers
blaves, grogues e vermelles;
Qui s'en pugen pels noguers
Roses blanques e vermelles
e d'altres floretes belles
e flors de lis e clavells
girofles, safrans novells
e poms d'amours e murtelles.

(Gillyflowers, blue, yellow and red
Here you see
And roses white and red
That climb the walnut trees;
Carnations, saffron, violets,
Myrtles, and other lovely flowers,
Such as the flower de lys.)

This might well be the introduction to the story of a piece of needlepoint. One test of good work is: can the flowers and leaves be identified? The greater their fidelity to nature, the better the work in which they appear.

Certain flowers, fruits, animals and insects came to be used more often than others, until special significance attached to them.

Perhaps the best-known example is the fleur de lis, often called flower de luce (flower of light.) Legend has it that a hermit presented three golden fleurs de lis on a piece of azure cloth to the Queen who married Clovis, first Christian king of France. The hermit had been given this cloth by an angel. He directed Clovis to use this for his emblem in place of the one Clovis already had.

**Fleur
de
Lis**



Panel For a Boy's Room

Robin Hood in Sherwood Forest. Flowers, sketched in the New Forest in England by the author, done in natural colors, on green ground. Designed and worked by the author. 10-point canvas.

The "lilies of France" are most frequently shown gold on an azure ground. A panel in one of the stained glass windows of Chartres Cathedral, below Sainte Anne, uses this coloring.

There has been some dispute as to whether the white iris is the original, or the small yellow one that grows wild in Europe, and is so plentiful along the old Appian Way.

English Rose The rose in English history is equally noted; the Tudor Rose (single, usually shown with ten petals and the open yellow heart) the white rose of York and the red rose of Lancaster all receiving due attention.

The thistle of Scotland and the shamrock of Ireland are used in fabrics so often that their origins are in danger of being lost through familiarity.

Unicorn The mythical unicorn is captured in the English Coat of Arms. One legend was that the unicorn could be captured only by a virgin; it came docilely and put its head into her lap. The series of tapestries "The Hunt of the Unicorn" bear out this story. Details of these tapestries are often copied in needlepoint.

Pomegranate The pomegranate appears in very early needlepoints, as well as in other fabrics. Its home city in Europe is Granada, Spain. Its name is said to mean "Pomme de Granada", "fruit of Granada." One of the city gates there is called the Gate of the Pomegranates, because the fruit is carved on the gate-posts. It signified hospitality.

Peacock The peacock appears especially in ecclesiastical work—it represents immortality. Ghirlandajo used it in his painting, "The Last Supper."

Pelican The pelican is an early Christian symbol of the care of the mother church for her children.

Fish The fish, a symbol by which Christians of the first and second centuries recognized each other, is frequently seen on church vestments. It is often shown in Tudor needlepoint.

Bee The bee of the Barberini popes is to be seen in many stations—from the papal crown to the border of a tapestry; it is carved over countless doorways and into fountains in Rome.

Carnation The carnation is used in needlepoint as frequently as the rose. Its common name is said to be a corruption of the word coronation; it is often seen in old fabrics and paintings decorating the heads of cherubims.

Oak Leaves and acorns, or the whole tree. The oak represents strength, or victory.

Laurel *Laurus nobilis* usually represents victory, from the ancient practice of crowning victors in the Olympian games with it.

Acanthus There is no well-authenticated reasons for using this leaf, except that it is naturally so decorative. It is carved into marble, stone, wood; molded into plaster, woven into tapestries, worked into needlepoint. It is perhaps the most commonly seen of all plant forms in art. Yet there is a curious fact—its blossom is not used. The tall flowering spike that rises from the winter rosette is graceful enough, and the individual blossoms, like over-grown snapdragons, are good lavender and creamy white. But they seem to have been overlooked completely.



Wall Panel

Yellow Lady's Slipper (*Cypripedium parviflorum*) designed and worked by the author. In natural colors, highlighted with silk; background, dull wood brown, in Bargello stitch.

Broom "Flower o' the broom,
Take away love, and our earth is a tomb!"
So sang Fra Lippo Lippi in Browning's poem by that name. It is the seed pod—the broom-cod—that appears in the Plantaganet Coat of Arms, and in various fabrics. It is often mistaken for a pea-pod, or a peasecod, as the older English has it.

The word Plantaganet comes from *Planta Genista*. The common name for broom in Italy is *Pianta genista*.

Background Colors

Since its only purpose is to accent and unify the design, the background needs to be inconspicuous. Chippendale used a dull blue-green most often, as did the early Gothic tapestries.

Dull wood brown and mustard color are found frequently in antiques, and are good because they do not over-accent any one color in the design.

The background should never be the first thing noticed in a piece of needlepoint.

Good designs use two or three shades of the same color in background. The slight change in intensity gives depth and contour.

Black is always to be avoided, because it sharpens the colors too much.

Background should be used in needlepoint as it is in painting—to soften, blend, unify and give contour to the main theme. What color does Rembrandt use behind his portraits? It is not so much color as suggested shadow. Botticelli, Fra Angelico, Rafael, Constable in their paintings often use no background at all—the subject fills the whole canvas.

Heraldry

A family Coat of Arms in needlepoint makes a fine personal design.

The first Coats of Arms were really coats, worn on top of suits of armor, and embroidered with distinctive devices in bright colors, to make the wearer's identification easy and certain. The crest was worn on top of the helmet.

Heraldry colors are pure and few. The metals gold and silver, and the colors blue, green, black and, rarely, purple. The metals are represented in needlepoint by the use of silk thread, the colors by pure shades of wool.

The purpose of a Coat of Arms was to be seen at a distance, and it has never lost that character. It must be clear in color and bold in design.

The important parts of a Coat of Arms are the crest and torse, and the shield with its charges. Helmet, mantling and bond with motto may be omitted. Often the very florid mantling detracts from the dignity of the shield.

Mantling is usually represented by acanthus leaves, the inside of the leaf being one of the main colors in the shield, and the outside the other main color.

The earlier the Coat of Arms, the simpler in form.

Coats of Arms are now displayed as small wall-hangings, for pole-screens, or with a background of flowers, as armorial hangings.

They should not be used as chair or bench-seats, for one reason because the design is bold, simple and not flexible, and for another because it seems discourteous to the distinguished ancestor whose sovereign first granted him the right to use the device as a sign of his house.

A Coat of Arms in needlepoint breaks the rule of having several colors in the background. Enough plain, dull wool is used to make the Coat of Arms stand out, but there is no attempt here at shadow.

The Last Word

The writer of these pages is not one of those who believe that the use of a paint-brush makes one an artist.

Out of her own experience, she most emphatically denies that a piece of needlepoint that combines truth, dignity and faultless craftsmanship is one that can be dashed off quickly and easily.

The designer must have the faculty to perceive or to imagine design, the will to labor over its drafting, and the courage to correct and discard.

But it is the writer's conviction that too many homemakers are accepting inferior standards in decorative textiles, never suspecting that they themselves might originate acceptable design. They forget that each designer is just another mortal, and that genius is half midnight oil.

She also believes that the American scene is good composition, and that while the Europe that travelers know is lost for a time to us—while the bells of St. Francis in Assisi ring only in our saddened memories; while the glories of Sainte-Chapelle may be now only bright bits of colored glass in a Paris street; while Kew Gardens in lilac-time may have no flowers, we present-day Americans are in a new sense Pilgrims.

Like our ancestors, we, too, turn from an intolerable Europe to face a new country. Whether we were of English or other origin, we have clung, so far, to the ways of the mother country.

This is the period when we Americans are maturing. Our art-work must not be the hasty scrawl of childhood; it must no longer be something for which the many complacently pay the few. It must no longer be something about which we wait to be told. Now it must grow out of this soil.

The names Seville, Assisi, Venice, Florence, London, Paris, Bordighera may thrill us with memories of pleasures we will not experience again. The same responsive chord can be touched by names like Hudson, Chesapeake, Potomac, Allegheny, Youghiogeny.

My idea of Heaven
Is a blue and airy sky-lot
Where good linen canvas
Is four feet wide
And there isn't any difference
In dye-lot.

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